

Underfunded and under-capacitated Dept. of Women cannot adequately fight femicide

By Nazley Shariff MP – DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities

The budget allocation to the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) of R85.2 million is too low. In fact, the R4.8 million decrease in budget vote 13 for the Department of Women's core work in programme two is unacceptable.

The Commission is performing relatively well, mostly because it's an independent Chapter 9 institution, however the fact that it is the least funded entity says a lot about where government's focus lies.

The CGE's Annual Performance Plan is focused on four strategic objectives aimed at legislation: attainment of gender equality, monitoring and evaluating gender-based violence, as well as building a sustainable organisation.

It goes without saying that the funding to the CGE must be increased, as they seem to be doing more work than the Department and would be able to put the money to better use as they actually work with people on the ground.

The Commission is inundated with cases from the public on various matters and struggles to close off these cases due to the lack of budget, staff and the inability to appointment Commissioners. The CGE also struggles with the overarching gender machinery for national key performance indicators (KPI), as well as the lack of funding for gender-based violence. How can we expect the Commission to do its job when we fail to provide the necessary funding and resources?

It is almost impossible for provincial Commissioners to reach rural areas from urban centres when there are not enough resources. This means that the Commission is unable to fulfil and deliver on its mandate.

Honourable Minister, the funding model must be revisited because we are directly impeding on the work of the Commission for Gender Equality.

When your department's core function is ensuring a just and equal society for women, youth and persons with disabilities - how is it possible that the most important part of the department's work is underfunded and under-capacitated? This, while the majority of the total budget goes towards the compensation of employees and provision of goods and services?

Unlike the Commission for Gender Equality, where most of the work is done by internal personnel, the department is unable to explain why it needs such a bloated workforce. How is it possible that the department is prioritising money for travel and subsistence when there are womxn, non-binary persons, children and persons living with disabilities struggling everyday?

I would like to reiterate my concerns regarding the lack of programmes, initiatives and frameworks aimed at the LGBTIQ+ community. As an ally, I will continue to raise my concerns regarding the lack of priority by National Government to assist and ensure a safe and equal society for all.

The Sanitary Drive Project is also of concern. The project seems to be somewhat of a tick box exercise and has taken much too long to roll out. The Department must start looking at reusable sanitary products for sustainability, the environment and most importantly to reach more people. The department's continued excuse that reusable sanitary products needs to be SABS approved, will no longer suffice. I call on the Minister to speed up the process to get the project going.

The Presidency and the department argue that they take GBV and femicide seriously, but the programmes aimed at fighting this are, again, underfunded and under-capacitated. The

National Council on Gender-Based Violence, as set out in the Annual Performance Plan will take a whole year to establish, develop a strategy, and will only be implemented in 2021.

This country does not have two more years for government to be shuffling its feet! We need intervention now and this needs to be a priority. Honourable Minister, I am not convinced that the department has its priorities straight and I am not convinced that the work of the department is focused on its Vision and the Mission that is worded with pretty terms and wrapped together with many of our hopes and dreams.

It is all just rhetoric. Actions speak louder than words and right now, the department's actions are almost non-existent.